

St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral
Shelton Square
Buffalo
Erie County
New York

HABS No. NY-5612

HABS
NY,
15-BUF,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

HABS
NY,
15-BUF,
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Location: Shelton Square, Buffalo, Erie County, New York

Present Owner and Occupant: Congregation of St. Paul's Cathedral, Diocese of Western New York

Present Use: Church and Cathedral

Statement of Significance: St. Paul's Cathedral--a key architectural landmark in downtown Buffalo--serves as a visual anchor for the south Main Street area. It is flanked on the west by Sullivan's Prudential Building of 1894-95 (NY-5487), and on the east by D. H. Burnham's Ellicott Square Building of 1895. With new commercial buildings rising above it to the north, the Cathedral and its surrounding park create an open, low-profile, pedestrian space.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1850-51. Although the church was consecrated in 1851, the porches and main belfry were not completed until 1856.
2. Architect: Richard Upjohn.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The site for the church, Lot 42, bounded by Main, Erie, Church, and Pearl Streets, was donated by the Holland Land Company in 1819. Doctor Cyrenius Chapin made the necessary arrangements with Joseph Ellicott for the deed transferral. The deed is recorded in the Erie County Clerk's Office, Liber 6, p. 247.
4. Builder or contractor, suppliers: Thomas R. Williams, superintendent of stonework; George Riker, superintendent of woodwork. After Williams' death, Robert Harron was put in charge of the stonework. John A. Lipp supervised the work on the tower and porches, after Harron's death. In 1870, Edwin Hurlbert, general building superintendent, supervised the work on the spire of the main tower. William S. Cass, Englishman, supervised the cutting and laying of stone. John Locke was superintendent of masonry. The building of the church was not completed under a contract, but was accomplished by day labor. The total cost was \$156,000-\$161,000.

5. Original plans: Thirteen sheets consisting of a plan, elevations, interior and exterior details, renderings, a lectern drawing dated August 8, 1851, a pencil rendering dated January 23, 1850. Avery Library, Columbia University.
6. Alterations and additions: An explosion of natural gas caused a fire on May 10, 1888, which gutted the entire interior of the church, including the roof. Only the walls of the nave and the bell tower and spire remained. The rebuilding of the church, between 1888 and 1890, was directed by Robert W. Gibson, New York City architect and designer of All Saints' Cathedral, Albany. Cyrus K. Porter and Son, of Buffalo, was the supervising architectural firm. Contracts were let to Charles Berrick, mason; William P. Collingwood, stone cutter; Jacob Reimann, carpenter; Kellogg, iron worker. Several changes were made in the original plans at this time. The chancel was enlarged thirteen feet to the east. The stone entrance porch and vestry room were added to the Church Street side as replacements for the smaller north porch and vestry room. The organ chamber was enlarged, making use of the gallery level above and the old vestry room below. There were many interior changes, including a redesign of the chancel arch. Generally the decorative wood treatment was less imposing than in the original structure.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

St. Paul's Cathedral is located near a site of a cannon mount for the defense of Buffalo during the War of 1812. The original frame church, built in 1819-21, was the first permanent church building in western New York.

St. Paul's Cathedral was constructed during the rectorship of Rev. William Shelton. As a follower of the Oxford Movement, which advocated a return to High-Church practices, Shelton perhaps influenced the selection of Upjohn as architect. Upjohn, at mid-century, was one of several architects working within the accepted mode of the Gothic Revival as prescribed by the New York Ecclesiological Society. This organization set forth architectural requirements and preferences for the construction of churches based on the English parish-church style.

It is interesting to note that St. Paul's congregation sent money to Nashota Episcopal Seminary, Nashota, Wisconsin. On that campus there is a residence known as Shelton Hall, the construction of which was paid for by Reverend Shelton and the congregation. Other contributions of this parish included memorial windows located in the seminary Chapel of

St. Mary the Virgin, which was designed by Upjohn in 1859-60. In 1851-53, Upjohn also designed St. John Chrysostom's Church in Delafield, Wisconsin, the closest community to Nashota House.

Millard Fillmore's body lay in state in the Cathedral, March 12, 1874.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Plans, notes, and drawings included in History of St. Paul's Church, Buffalo, N. Y., 1817-1888, are contained in the collection of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. Many interior and exterior photographs dating from 1867-95 are included in the Iconographic Collection, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. A photograph of the model built from Upjohn's drawings is also contained in this collection.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Bartlett Papers. Manuscript Collection, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

Clinton, Mrs. George, Jr. "Points on the Architecture of Buffalo Churches." Unpublished manuscript, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

DeMille, George Edmund. St. Paul's Cathedral, Buffalo. 1817-1967. A Brief History. Buffalo: Hoffman Printing Co., 1966.

Evans, Charles W. History of St. Paul's Church, Buffalo, N. Y. 1817-1888. Buffalo: Matthews-Northrup Works, 1903. (DLC) BX5930.B953

Edited with footnotes, occasional additions in the text and a continuation of the history from 1888 to 1903 by Alice M. Evans Bartlett and G. Hunter Bartlett.

New York Ecclesiologist. October, 1848; April, June, 1849; July, 1850; July, September, 1851.

Stanton, Phoebe B. The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture. An Episode in Taste, 1840-

1856. The Johns Hopkins Studies in Nineteenth-Century Architecture. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968.

Upjohn, Everard M. Richard Upjohn, Architect and Churchman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This stone church is typical of the irregular plan developed as a model for English parish churches. The Gothic detailing, although based on historical antecedents, is treated very much as vernacular decoration of the period, c. 1900.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 175 feet by 94 feet; irregular plan; nine bays and tower.
2. Foundations: Stone to grade. There is a red sandstone water table.
3. Wall construction: The red Medina sandstone is set in a random ashlar pattern. The stone was brought to Buffalo on the Erie Canal from a quarry near Hulberton, N. Y., which was owned by the parish.
4. Structural system: The load-bearing masonry walls have pier buttresses which are capped with decorative finials. Fireproof interior construction consists of concrete floor, brick arches, steel beams on stone piers, and corrugated iron lath.
5. Porches: All porches are enclosed. Flights of stone steps provide access to the elevated entrances.
6. Chimneys: Two chimneys are disguised with Gothic ornamentation.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways: There are five arched entrances with two-leaf doors. These entrances provide access to the west porch and narthex, northwest porch, northeast porch, south porch, and the basement entrance under the northeast porch. An arched single-leaf door opens into the sacristy. All doors are wooden with chamfered stiles and rails; all have wrought-iron strap hinges. The doors are framed by compound sandstone moldings.
- b. Windows: All nave and chancel lancet windows contain stained-glass depictions of a series of events in the life of Christ. Each gable of the transept contains a stained-glass rose window framed by wooden tracery. A third rose window is located in the west gable. The window above the chapel altar in the northwest gable and the large window in the north wall of the chapel contain stained-glass designs of Biblical scenes. The lancet clerestory windows contain stained-glass depictions of various saints. All stained glass other than that contained in memorial windows was supplied by J. and R. Lamb of New York. The enlarged east window in the sanctuary, a memorial to Rev. William Shelton, depicts the Ascension. This window was designed by Holliday and Company of London. Windows in the west and northwest porches and narthex honor several schools of Buffalo's universities.

8. Roof: The steeply pitched gabled components of the roof are covered with slate shingles. Each gable is topped by a stone cross. All ridgepoles are finished with tile. The cornice and eaves are of sandstone, with a gutter hidden behind the cornice. Downspouts are placed at regular intervals. Most of the cornices have compound dentils; the chancel cornice treatment consists of a running trefoil design with high-relief pendants. The square main tower at the southwest end is capped by an octagonal spire. This 275-foot structure is completely finished in sandstone. The lower portion of the tower is heavily buttressed. The four levels in the square portion contain various lancet, circular, and slit windows. The running trefoil design marks the upper limit of the square portion and defines the termination of the pier buttresses. A smaller octagonal tower at the northeast corner is 125 feet high. It is also finished in sandstone. Eight lancet openings are filled with louvers. The sandstone cornice contains the running trefoil design.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The nave, with center aisle and north and south side aisles, is approached from the narthex on the west. The south, west, and northwest porches provide access to the north-south narthex. The center aisle terminates at the altar rail located at the east end of a rather large chancel. The Richmond Chapel, fifty feet by twenty-eight feet, is located to the north of the north side aisle. Access to the wide north-south aisle at the east end of the nave is provided by a small entrance hall leading from the northeast porch. An organ gallery is located above the narthex. A sacristy is located to the south and east of the northeast porch. The crypt is a vaulted brick receiving room in the basement.
2. Stairways: All stairways are enclosed. The stairway to the basement is located in the northwest porch. The enclosed stairway to the gallery is located in the anteroom to the west of the south porch. Each tower has a narrow stairway.
3. Flooring: All aisles are covered with slate tiles. All flooring under the pews is covered with linoleum. The chancel step risers are decorated with a marble arabesque design of passion flowers. The chancel aisle between the choir stalls has a red and white Champlain marble floor laid in a geometric design with quatrefoils. A marble floor in a Greek-cross pattern of dull red on a white ground with borders of oak leaves and acorns is located at the foot of the sanctuary step. The sanctuary has a marble mosaic floor, laid in a vine-and-grape design. A central design in front of the altar depicts the four Evangelists around a Greek cross. This floor was made in Paris and laid by Burke and Company of New York and Chicago. The northwest porch has a marble mosaic floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls are painted plaster. It is apparent from research that after the rebuilding, 1888-90, some fresco work by Edward J. N. Stent adorned the walls. The four-bay nave is marked by sandstone columns consisting of a square shaft with four engaged columns, each having a foliate capital. Responds on the south wall mark the bays in the side aisle. The chapel opens to the nave through three large arches carried on small, compound columns. All arches have painted masonry moldings. All windows are capped with label moldings. The open, timbered ceiling of spruce is stained to match the oak woodwork. The spandrels are

pierced with trefoils. The beams terminate in carved and gilded angels. The flat ceiling of the side aisle is coffered.

5. Doorways and doors: All doors are of heavy paneled oak. All doorways are framed with oak molding.
6. Special decorative features: The altar of Mexican onyx was designed by Robert W. Gibson. The inlay work was done by Lautz and Company of Buffalo. The stone reredos--also designed by Gibson--contains six panels of imported glass mosaics. The oak chancel furniture--sedilia, credence table and Bishop's chair--was designed by Gibson. He also designed the Scotch sandstone pulpit and font. The sandstone communion rail has a marble cap. The oak pews have carved ends consisting of a panel with a pointed arch, which encloses two smaller arches under a quatrefoil. The oratory altar located at the east end of the south transept features an elaborate triptych designed to frame the fourteenth-century painting by Jan Pollack. The chancel organ, built in 1952 by the Schlicker Organ Company, contains 2705 pipes. The gallery organ, built by the English organ builder Robert Hope-Jones in 1908, has 1385 pipes. The gallery also contains an eighty-five-pipe Trompeta Real built by the Schlicker Company in 1964. St. Paul's Cathedral has several architectural fragments from European structures. A fragment of a pillar from the Cloth Hall, Ypres, Belgium, is mounted as a memorial to the Belgians who died in World War I. On the south wall of the sanctuary is a fragment of the high altar of Notre Dame Cathedral, Rheims. A stone fragment of the wall of Christ's Cathedral, Canterbury, c. 1000, is located near the Bishop's chair.
7. Hardware: None of note.
8. Lighting: All fixtures are modern adaptations of English nineteenth-century models.
9. Heating: The hot-air furnace is located in the basement.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Until 1970, the Cathedral was completely surrounded by streets. In that year, Erie Street to the south was closed, and the street was developed into an open space with trees and benches. This area, called Cathedral Park, was designed by Cambridge Seven Architects.

2. Historic landscape design: An iron fence completely surrounds the property. Its cast-iron posts have miniature octagonal towers, each topped by a decorative pinnacle.

Prepared by Susan R. Slade
September 1973

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This photo-data book was prepared as part of a 1964-65 recording project in cooperation with the Buffalo-Western New York Chapter of AIA, Olaf William Shelgren (at that time Chairman of the Chapter's Preservation Committee), and Olaf William Shelgren, Jr.--both, of the firm Shelgren, Patterson and Marzec. Photographs were taken in May, 1965, by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer. Under the direction of John C. Poppeliers, Chief, HABS, a further research and editorial project was undertaken in September, 1973, by Susan R. Slade, architectural historian.